Turns and Movies

and Other Tales in Verse

By Conrad Aiken

THE NEW POETRY SERIES

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
Boston and New York

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Tales in Verse

BY

CONRAD AIKEN

Author of

"Earth Triumphant, and Other Tales in Verse"

BOSTON AND NEW YORK

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

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TO
MY WIFE

NOTE

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TURNS AND MOVIES

I. ROSE AND MURRAY

After the movie, when the lights come up,
He takes her powdered hand behind the wings;
She, all in yellow, like a buttercup,
Lifts her white face, yearns up to him, and clings;
And with a silent, gliding step they move
Over the footlights, in familiar glare,
Panther-like in the Tango whirl of love,
He fawning close on her with idiot stare.
Swiftly they cross the stage. O lyric ease!
The drunken music follows the sure feet,
The swaying elbows, intergliding knees,
Moving with slow precision on the beat.
She was a waitress in a restaurant,
He picked her up and taught her how to dance.
Love-phrases that he whispered her still haunt.
She feels his arms, lifts an appealing glance,
But knows he spent last evening with Zudora;
And knows that certain changes are before her.

The brilliant spotlight circles them around,
Flashing the spangles on her weighted dress.

He mimics wooing her, without a sound,
Flatters her with a smoothly smiled caress.
He fears that she will some day queer his act;
Feeling her anger. He will quit her soon.
He nods for faster music. He will contract
Another partner, under another moon.
Meanwhile, "smooth stuff." He lets his dry eyes flit
Over the yellow faces there below;
Maybe he'll cut down on his drinks a bit,
Not to annoy her, and so spoil the show. . . .
Zudora, waiting for her turn to come,
Watches them from the wings, and fatly leers
At the girl's younger face, so white and dumb,
And the fixed, anguished eyes, ready for tears.

She lies beside him, with a false wedding-ring,
In a cheap room, with moonlight on the floor;
The moonlit curtains remind her much of spring,
Of a spring evening on the Coney shore.
And while he sleeps, knowing she ought to hate,
She still clings to the lover that she knew,—
The one that, with a pencil, on a plate,
Drew a heart and wrote, "I'd die for you."

II. THE APOLLO TRIO

FROM acting profile parts in the "legit,"
He came to this; and he is sick of it.
The singing part is easy. What he hates
Is traveling with these damned degenerates,
Tight-trousered, scented, both with women's hips,
With penciled eyes, and lean vermilioned lips.
Loving each other so, they pick on him, —
Horse him, off stage and on. He smiles, is grim,
Plays up the part, saving his final card
Till Jones should dare to slap his face too hard.
But what's "too hard"? — Meanwhile, four times a day
He drinks, to make things pleasanter; while they
(Those damned degenerates) eat up cocaine.
The call-boy calls him on. And once again
With a crushed hat, long hair, and powdered face,
Dressed as the villain, in black, he booms deep bass,
Asks the fool question, takes the slap, and sings
As if he did for the first time all those things.
My God, how tired he is of hearing Jones,
Simpering sweetly in falsetto tones,
"Chase me, boys, I issue trading-stamps:"
Tired of grease-paint, dirty clothes, and lamps.

At ease on sawdust floors, he leans and drinks,
Swapping old stories with the crowd; or thinks,
Roving a blear green eye about the bar,
Of the girl he loved, or the one time he was star.

III. TWO McNEILS

He skips out lithe and tense into the light,
Throws off his gown, and smiling, lifts his hands
With a theatric gesture, opening fingers,
Like a vain child. And having rippled slowly
Under the smooth white tights the gleaming muscles,
Smiling again, he turns; and lifts black weights, —
Staggering, flushing deep his face and neck, —
To drop them with a crash. She, sweet and blonde,
Stands by (in white tights too), smiles at the people,
Catching the handkerchief he tosses to her
When he has wiped his hands; and at the end,
Feigning timidity, sits in a chair
Which he heaves up to balance in his teeth.
But as she sits there, waving frantic hands,
And sees his coarse red fist gesticulating,
She looks down on him with a look of hatred,
And wishes he would only burst a vein.

"Where did you get that ring?" he said to her,
While they were waiting turn. She looked at it,

Twisting her head to this side and to that
To see it sparkle. "What is that to you?"
"That drummer gave it to you. I've seen him watch
you."
"What if he does?" "You cut it out, that's all!
Don't you forget that time that I half-killed Schmidt."
She smiled at him. "Why drag that up again?"
Then, they went on,—he quivering, she cool. . . .
And as she caught his handkerchief, she turned
Disgusted from him, thinking of her lover;
And how he said in his delicious voice,
"I'll meet you Thursday night at half-past ten."

IV. DUVAL'S BIRDS

THE parrot, screeching, flew out into the darkness,
Circled three times above the upturned faces
With a great whir of brilliant outspread wings,
And then returned to stagger on her finger.
She bowed and smiled, eliciting applause. . . .
The property man hated her dirty birds.
But it had taken years — yes, years — to train them,
To shoulder flags, strike bells by tweaking strings,
Or climb sedately little flights of stairs.
When they were stubborn, she tapped them with a
wand,

And her eyes glittered a little under the eyebrows.
The red one flapped and flapped on a swinging wire;
The little white ones winked round yellow eyes.

V. GABRIEL DE FORD

He slips in through the stage-door, always singing;
Still singing, he slips out, without a word
To stage-door man, or any of the others.
All through his act, wagging upon each hand
A grotesque manikin, he laughs and sings,
Sings with a far-off ventriloquial voice
Through fixed and smiling lips. Sometimes, not often,
He barely moves his mouth, for a ghostly word.
You see his throat fill, or his nostrils quiver.
But then, staring ahead with stretched white eyes,
And never stirring, he throws his voice way off,
Faintly under the stage, or in the wings,
Creeping nearer, or fading to a whisper.
And since he always sings and never talks,
And flits by nervously, swinging his cane,
Rumors are thick about him through the circuit.
Some say he hates the women, and loves men:
That once, out West, he tried to kiss a man,
Was badly hurt, then almost killed himself.
Others maintain a woman jilted him.

But the one story they tell everywhere
Is how, at his father's funeral, he threw his voice
Suddenly into the coffin; and all the mourners
Jumped from their seats and ran, and women fainted,
And the preacher stopped the service, white as wax.

Zudora said a friend of hers had seen him
Mooning alone at "Carmen." And at the end
He cried like a baby: what do you think of that.

VI. VIOLET MOORE AND BERT MOORE

He thinks her little feet should pass
Where dandelions star thickly grass;
Her hands should lift in sunlit air,
Sea-wind should tangle up her hair.
Green leaves, he says, have never heard
A sweeter ragtime mockingbird,
Nor has the moon-man ever seen,
Or man in the spotlight, leering green,
Such a beguiling, smiling queen.

Her eyes, he says, are stars at dusk,
Her mouth as sweet as red-rose-musk;
And when she dances his young heart swells
With flutes and viols and silver bells;

His brain is dizzy, his senses swim,
When she slants her ragtime eyes at him. . . .

Moonlight shadows, he bids her see,
Move no more silently than she.
It was this way, he says, she came,
Into his cold heart, bearing flame.
And now that his heart is all on fire
Will she refuse his heart's desire?—
And O! has the Moon Man ever seen
(Or the spotlight devil, leering green)
A sweeter shadow upon a screen?

VII. ZUDORA

HERE on the pale beach, in the darkness;
With the full moon just to rise;
They sit alone, and look over the sea,
Or into each others' eyes. . . .

She pokes her parasol into the sleepy sand,
Or sifts the lazy whiteness through her hand.

"A lovely night," he says. "The moon,
Comes up for you and me.
Just like a blind old spotlight there,
Fizzing across the sea!"

She pays no heed, nor even turns her head:
He slides his arm around her waist instead.

"Why don't we do a sketch together?—
Those songs you sing are swell.
Where did you get them, anyway?
They suit you awfully well."

She will not turn to him — will not resist.
Impassive, she submits to being kissed.

"My husband wrote all four of them.
You know, — my husband drowned.
He was always sickly, soon depressed . . ."
But still she hears the sound

Of a stateroom door shut hard, and footsteps going
Swiftly and steadily ; and the dark sea flowing.

She hears the cold sea flowing, and sees his eyes
Hollow with disenchantment, sick surprise, —

And hate of her whom he had loved too well. . . .
She lowers her eyes, demurely prods a shell.

"Yes. We might do an act together.
That would be very nice."
He kisses her passionately, and thinks
She's carnal, but cold as ice.

VIII. AMOROSA AND COMPANY

WELL, there was still a sure hand, anyway,
When she stood up alone, in a casket of light,
In the jet velvet blackness; and round her neck,
And along her outstretched naked gleaming arms,
Felt the cool python slowly coil and coil. . . .
But that was for the snake, more than for her.
And when that Russian upstart ran out dancing,
Flinging her little knees up, so affected,
And throwing her arms about so foolishly,
The audience went half-crazy with applause!
Pretty? Well, if you call it pretty, to have
That listless scanty flaxen hair, and eyes
So sentimentally blue. When she was hired,
She was half-starved, poor thing, and cried and cried,—
And, really, it was half in pity she took her.
And now to have her getting all the notice,
With those ridiculous dances! Hopping about,
Frisking her hands up, perking her rat's head sideways,
Smiling, or looking sad, running and jumping,

Or toddling on her toes — it was disgusting.
And as if that were n't enough, to have her men
All whining round this girl like a lot of tom-cats,
Even her husband! — (not that *she* wanted him).
And then, to have that cornet player get up
And give her a box of roses, on top of all! . . .
She wondered if her strength would fail her, sometimes;
And if, instead of smiling, when the girl
Was given an encore (taking her hand to share it),
She 'd suddenly burst out laughing and slap her face:
The wretched thin little measly skin-and-bones!

— She paused, fatigued with combing out her hair,
Sick of trying to get those scraps of tinsel,
And stared at red mirrored eyes. She was getting old.

IX. BAIN'S CATS AND RATS

QUIET, and almost bashful, and seldom looking
Into the rows of eyes below and above,
He went about his work as if alone;
His cats, upon their table, sat and yawned:
Or, paws curled under, blinked their sleepy eyes.
And one by one, with deft pale hand, he lifted
Rats from a lidded box, and set each one
On a little pedestal. And then a cat,

Black, with green insolent eyes, gravely and sleekly
Stepped over them, and sniffed, and waved his tail,
And glared at the spotlight with his ears laid back,
And leapt back to the table. . . . The audience laughed. . . .
Later, when one cat balked, he gave up weakly,
And let the curtain fall, with scant applause.

Ten years before this he had lost his wife.
He was a trapeze artist: in his act,
While hanging from the trapeze by his legs,
Lifted the girl up in a jeweled girdle
Clenched in his teeth, and twirled her with his hands,
In darkness, with the spotlight blazing on them.
It was a love-match. — Many had envied them.
But he was always queer, a moody man,
And things got quickly on his nerves. The girl,
Perhaps, had been too young. . . . But anyway,
One night before his act they heard him scolding —
"For Christ's sake, put less powder on your arms!
Look at my clothes — look here!" — And that same night
He let her fall — or anyway, she fell,
And died without a word. Soon after that
He quit the trapeze work, and got these rats. . . .

Sometimes there on the stage, he heard himself
Saying, until the words grew meaningless,

Multiplying themselves in tireless rhythms,
"I 'm sick of her. But how get rid of her?
Why don't I let her fall? — She's killing me!"
And then he'd glance, half-scared, into the wings.

X. THE CORNET

When she came out, that white little Russian dancer,
With her bright hair, and her eyes so young, so young,
He suddenly lost his leader, and all the players,
And only heard an immortal music sung, —

Of dryads flashing in the green woods of April,
On cobwebs trembling over the deep wet grass:
Fleeing their shadows with laughter, with hands uplifted,
Through the whirled sinister sun he saw them pass, —

Lovely immortals gone, yet existing somewhere,
Still somewhere laughing in woods of immortal green,
Youth he had lived among fires, or dreamed of living,
Lovers in youth once seen, or dreamed he had seen. . . .

And watching her knees flash up, and her young hands beckon,
And the hair that streamed behind, and the taunting eyes,
He felt this place dissolving in living darkness,
And through the darkness he felt his childhood rise,

Soft, and shining, and sweet, hands filled with petals. . . .
And watching her dance, he was grateful to forget
These fiddlers, leaning and drawing their bows together,
And the tired fingers on the stops of his cornet.

XI

SITTING in a café, and watching her reflection
Smoke a cigarette, or drinking coffee,
She laughed hard-heartedly at his dejection. . . .
He laid his cigarette down in his saucer,
And stolid with despair
Put his elbows on the table, ran his fingers through his hair.

Watching how her lips primmed, dusty in the mirror,
To meet the gilded tip between her fingers,
As the cigarette approached them in her hand:
She told him he was seriously in error. . . .
And noticing how her lips moved, in reflection,
She thought it queer, she said,
That in spite of all her warnings he should go and lose his
head.

Just as she was smiling, the noisy music started;
She tapped upon the tablecloth in rhythm. . . .
Were those blue eyes of hers so icy-hearted?
How was it, otherwise, she could not like him?

Women were different, then,
From these strangely childlike passionate selfish men. . . .

She rose and took his arm; they slowly walked together
Out through the maze of tables, people drinking,
Into the windy void of rainy weather. . . .
And in the taxi, sitting dark beside him,
She moved, and touched his knee,
And when he kissed her, hated him, but kissed him,
passionately.

XII. AERIAL DODDS

Ingratitude — the damned ingratitude!
After these years, and all he'd done for him,
To run away like this without a word!
Without so much as thanks, — and still a boy, —
Though he had taken him as a child and trained him!
This moment, he could kill him with his hands,
Wring his young neck. . . . And worst of all, to think,
After he'd poured out love on him so long,
That he should run off with that rotten girl,
That whore, who could n't dance, and could n't sing,
Who only kept her job because, being shameless,
She splashed about in the spotlight like a mermaid!
My God; he'd kill him if he ever found him.
Had he been cruel to him? No, not cruel.

Sure, he had whipped him sometimes, — once in a while, —
Partly for discipline, of course. . . . But never
More than to make him shrink, or his lips tremble,
His cheeks a little white. Not more than that.
And then, he had loved him so! And given him things,
All the money he needed, and all the clothes. . . .
— And the boy had been a foundling to begin with!

He got up from his chair, groped in the darkness,
And struck a match under the mantelpiece, —
Watching it spurt from blue to yellow flame,
Startling the room with agitated shadows.
And one by one he lifted from the trunk
The clothes the boy had worn: the soft-soled shoes;
The white ones with the sockets in the heels,
For whirling in the swing; the satin tights,
And the broad golden girdle, crystal starred.
He had looked lovely in this sleek white satin —
And he remembered now the day they bought it;
And how he stood up, smiling, by the mirror,
With big blue fearless eyes, and curly hair,
Just as he looked, sitting in his trapeze,
Wiping his hands so calm, and gazing down.
His throat was just like ivory, in this lace. . . .
And he had looked so slim, so like a child,
So white and fragile!

And now, my God, he 'd gone.
And he would never touch again that skin,
So young and soft; or have against his mouth
Those curls . . . or feel the long-tongued venomous whip
Curl round those knees, and see the young mouth tremble.

XIII

How is it that I am now so softly awakened,
My leaves shaken down with music? —
Darling, I love you.

It is not your mouth, for I have known mouths before, —
Though your mouth is more alive than roses,
Roses singing softly
To green leaves after rain.

It is not your eyes, for I have dived often in eyes, —
Though your eyes, even in the yellow glare of footlights,
Are windows into eternal dusk.

Nor is it the live white flashing of your feet,
Nor your gay hands, catching at motes in the spotlight;
Nor the abrupt thick music of your laughter,
When, against the hideous backdrop,
With all its crudities brilliantly lighted,

Suddenly you catch sight of your alarming shadow,
Whirling and contracting.

How is it, then, that I am now so keenly aware,
So sensitive to the surges of the wind, or the light,
Heaving silently under blue seas of air?—
Darling, I love you, I am immersed in you.

It is not the unraveled night-time of your hair,—
Though I grow drunk when you press it upon my face:
And though when you gloss its length with a golden brush
I am strings that tremble under a bow.

It was that night I saw you dancing,
The whirl and impalpable float of your garment,
Your throat lifted, your face aglow
(Like waterlilies in moonlight were your knees).

It was that night I heard you singing
In the green-room after your dance was over,
Faint and uneven through the thickness of walls.

(How shall I come to you through the dullness of walls,
Thrusting aside the hands of bitter opinion?)

It was that afternoon, early in June,
When, tired with a sleepless night, and my act performed,
Feeling as stale as streets,

BOARDMAN AND COFFIN

We met under dropping boughs, and you smiled to me:
And we sat by a watery surface of clouds and sky.

I hear only the susurration of intimate leaves;
The stealthy gliding of branches upon slow air.

I see only the point of your chin in sunlight;
And the sinister blue of sunlight on your hair.

The sunlight settles downward upon us in silence.

Now we thrust up through grass-blades and encounter,
Pushing white hands amid the green.
Your face flowers whitely among cold leaves.
Soil clings to you, bark falls from you,
You rouse and stretch upward, exhaling earth, inhaling sky,
I touch you, and we drift off together like moons.
Earth dips from under.

We are alone in an immensity of sunlight,
Specks in an infinite golden radiance,
Whirled and tossed upon cataracts and silent torrents.
Give me your hands, darling! We float downward.

XIV. BOARDMAN AND COFFIN

I TOLD him straight, if he touched me, just once more, —
That way, you know, — I 'd kill him. And I did.

Why should n't I? I told him straight I would.
And here I am! — And I hope to God I die.
You would n't think this hand could hit so hard, —
Look, there 's still powder on it, and rouge on the nails!
Maybe it 's blood. — I told him, if he touched me! —
And he 'd come grinning up, and think, because
The house was watching everything we did,
That he could touch me, while he danced with me, —
That way, you know, — and get away with it. . . .
Well, you can't say I did n't give him warning.
My God, I hated him! The things he did!
You would n't believe them if I told them to you,
They were so nasty. They almost killed me, — killed
me, —
Night after night! — Well, anyway, he 's dead,
Dead as a stick, or a stone, or an old cigar-butt.
You would n't think I would do a thing like that, —
I don't look strong, do I? — But when you 're dancing,
You 've got to keep in shape. And then, my God! —
When he came leering downward with those eyes,
Those red-brown eyes, like fire, like a vampire's eyes,
I thought I 'd scream, go mad, or fling myself
Over the footlights, into the orchestra, —
Anywhere, anywhere, — only to get away!
They were like wheels of fire, those eyes of his, —
Whirling and whirling, and always getting bigger;

Like terrible doors, with fires roaring inside them,
Roaring and roaring, and always coming nearer, —
And sort of sucking at me, and pulling my dress,
And pressing hot cruel fingers against my breasts,
And blowing my hair up, and pushing against my knees, —
And all the while laughing and laughing at me!
O, it was terrible, terrible, — like a nightmare,
Slowly leaning downward upon you and crushing,
And your heart stops beating, and you can't move a finger,
But lie there sweating! —

I had to kill him, — that 's all, — I had to kill him.
I told him straight, if he touched me just once more, —
That way, you know, — I 'd kill him. And I did.
Those fire-wheel eyes! Do you know what I thought I was doing?
Well, when they came down, bigger and bigger, and whirling,
Whirling so fast, with fire all round the rims,
And the spokes all going so quick you could n't see them,
Only a sort of blur, — I thought I 'd stop them,
By suddenly sticking a knife in through the spokes!
And I did. And all of a sudden the music stopped —
Just like grand opera! And he was kneeling there,
Putting his hands down, sort of groping, and nodding,
As if he were looking for something. Ha! A joke.

And seeing that he was done for, I stabbed myself:
A Jap I knew once showed me how to do it.
And I heard great bells go roaring down the darkness;
And a wind rushed after them. And that was all.

XV. DANCING ADAIRS

BEHOLD me, in my chiffon, gauze, and tinsel,
Flitting out of the shadow into the spotlight,
And into the shadow again, without a whisper! —
Firefly 's my name. I am evanescent.

Firefly 's your name. You are evanescent.
But I follow you as remorselessly as darkness,
And shut you in and enclose you, at last, and always,
Till you are lost, — as a voice is lost in silence.

Till I am lost, as a voice is lost in silence. . . .
Are you the one who would close so cool about me?
My fire sheds into and through you and beyond you:
How can your fingers hold me? I am elusive.

How can my fingers hold you? You are elusive?
Yes, you are flame; but I surround and love you,
Always extend beyond you, cool, eternal,
To take you into my heart's great void of silence.

You shut me into your heart's great void of silence. . . .
O sweet and soothing end for a life of whirling!
Now I am still, whose life was mazed with motion.
Now I sink into you, for love of sleep.

DISCORDANTS

I

Music I heard with you was more than music,
And bread I broke with you was more than bread;
Now that I am without you, all is desolate;
All that was once so beautiful is dead.

Your hands once touched this table and this silver,
And I have seen your fingers hold this glass.
These things do not remember you, belovèd, —
And yet your touch upon them will not pass.

For it was in my heart you moved among them,
And blessed them with your hands and with your eyes;
And in my heart they will remember always, —
They knew you once, O beautiful and wise.

II

My heart has become as hard as a city street,
The horses trample upon it, it sings like iron,
All day long and all night long they beat,
They ring like the hooves of time.

My heart has become as drab as a city park,
The grass is worn with the feet of shameless lovers,
A match is struck, there is kissing in the dark,
The moon comes, pale with sleep.

My heart is torn with the sound of raucous voices,
They shout from the slums, from the streets, from the
crowded places,
And tunes from a hurdy-gurdy that coldly rejoices
Shoot arrows into my heart.

O my belovèd, sleeping so far from me,
Walking alone in sunlight, or in blue moonlight,
Are you alive there, far across that sea,
Or were you only a dream?

III

VERMILIONED mouth, tired with many kisses,
Eyes, that have lighted for so many eyes,—
Are you not weary yet with countless lovers,
Desirous now to take even me for prize?

Draw not my glance, nor set my sick heart beating,—
Body so stripped, for all your silks and lace.
Do not reach out pale hands to me, seductive,
Nor slant sly eyes, O subtly smiling face.

For I am drawn to you, like wind I follow,
Like a warm amorous wind . . . though I desire
Even in dream to keep one face before me,
One face like fire, and holier than fire.

. . . . . .

I walk beneath these trees, and in this darkness
Muse beyond seas of her from whom I came,
While you, with catlike step, steal close beside me,
Spreading your perfume round me like soft flame.

Ah! should I once stoop face and forehead to you,
Into and through your sweetness, a night like this,
In the lime-blossomed darkness feel your bosom,
Warm and so soft, and find your lips to kiss,

And tear at your strange flesh with crazy fingers,
And drink with mouth gone mad your eyes' wild
wine,
And cleave to you, body with breathless body,
Till bestial were exalted to divine, —

Would I again, O lamia silked and scented,
Out of the slumberous magic of your eyes,
And your narcotic perfume, soft and febrile,
Have the romantic hardihood to rise,

And set my heart across great seas of distance
With love unsullied for her from whom I came?—
With catlike step you steal beside me, past me,
Leaving your perfume round me like soft flame.

IV

DEAD Cleopatra lies in a crystal casket,
Wrapped and spiced by the cunningest of hands.
Around her neck they have put a golden necklace,
Her tatbebs, it is said, are worn with sands.

Dead Cleopatra was once revered in Egypt,
Warm-eyed she was, this princess of the South.
Now she is very old and dry and faded,
With black bitumen they have sealed up her mouth.

Grave-robbers pulled the gold rings from her fingers,
Despite the holy symbols across her breast;
They scared the bats that quietly whirled above her.
Poor lady! she would have been long since at rest,

If she had not been wrapped and spiced so shrewdly,
Preserved, obscene, to mock black flights of years. . . .
What would her lover have said, — had he foreseen it?
Had he been moved to ecstasy, — or tears?

O sweet clean earth, from whom the green blade cometh!
When we are dead, my best belovèd and I,
Close well above us, that we may rest forever,
Sending up grass and blossoms to the sky.

V

In the noisy street,
Where the sifted sunlight yellows the pallid faces,
Sudden I close my eyes, and on my eyelids
Feel from the far-off sea a cool faint spray, —

A breath on my cheek,
From the tumbling breakers and foam, the hard sand
shattered,
Gulls in the high wind whistling, flashing waters,
Smoke from the flashing waters blown on rocks;

— And I know once more,
O dearly belovèd! — that all these seas are between us,
Tumult and madness, desolate save for the sea-gulls,
You on the farther shore, and I in this street.

EVENSONG

This song is of no importance,
I will only improvise;
Yet, maybe, here and there,
Suddenly from these sounds a chord will start
And piercingly touch my heart.

I

In the pale mauve twilight, streaked with orange,
Exquisitely sweet, —
She leaned upon her balcony and looked across the street;
And across the huddled roofs of the misty city,
Across the hills of tenements, so gray,
She looked into the west with a young and infinite pity,
With a young and wistful pity, as if to say
That dark was coming, and irresistible night,
Which man would attempt to meet
With here and there a little flickering light. . . .
The orange faded, the housetops all were black,
And a strange and beautiful quiet
Came unexpected, came exquisitely sweet,
On market-place and street;

And where were lately crowds and sounds and riot
Was a gentle blowing of wind, a murmur of leaves,
A single step, or voice, and under the eaves
The scrambling of sparrows; and then the hush swept back.

II

She leaned upon her balcony, in the darkness,
Folding her hands beneath her chin;
And watched the lamps begin
Here and there to pierce like eyes the darkness,—
From windows, luminous rooms,
And from the damp dark street
Between the moving branches, and the leaves with rain still sweet.
It was strange: the leaves thus seen,
With the lamplight's cold bright glare thrown up among them,—
The restless maple leaves,
Twinkling their myriad shadows beneath the eaves,—
Were lovelier, almost, than with sunlight on them,
So bright they were with young translucent green;
Were lovelier, almost, than with moonlight on them. . . .
And looking so wistfully across the city,
With such a young, and wise, and infinite pity
For the girl who had no lover

To walk with her along a street like this,
With slow steps in the rain, both aching for a kiss, —
It seemed as if all evenings were the same,
As if all evenings came
With just such tragic peacefulness as this;
With just such hint of loneliness or pain,
The quiet after rain.

III

WOULD her lover, then, grow old sooner than she,
And find a night like this too damp to walk?
Would he prefer to stay indoors and talk,
Or read the evening paper, while she sewed, or darned a sock,
And listened to the ticking of the clock:
Would he prefer it to lamplight on a tree?
Would he be old and tired,
And, having all the comforts he desired,
Take no interest in the twilight coming down
So beautifully and quietly on the town?
Would her lover, then, grow old sooner than she?

IV

A NEIGHBOR started singing, singing a child to sleep.
It was strange: a song thus heard, —

EVENSONG

In the misty evening, after an afternoon of rain,—
Seemed more beautiful than happiness, more beautiful
than pain,
Seemed to escape the music and the word,
Only, somehow, to keep
A warmth that was lovelier than the song of any bird.
Was it because it came up through this tree,
Through the lucent leaves that twinkled on this tree,
With the bright lamp there beneath them in the street?
It was exquisitely sweet:
So unaffected, so unconscious that it was heard.
Or was it because she looked across the city,
Across the hills of tenements, so black,
And thought of all the mothers with a young and infinite
pity? . . .
The child had fallen asleep, the hush swept back,
The leaves hung lifeless on the tree.

V

It was too bad the sky was dark.
A cat came slinking close along the wall.
For the moon was full just now, and in the park,
If the sky were clear at all,
The lovers upon the moonlit grass would sprawl,
And whisper in the shadows, and laugh, and there

She would be going, maybe, with a white rose in her hair . . .
But would youth at last grow weary of these things,
Of the ribbons and the laces,
And the latest way of putting up one's hair?
Would she no longer care,
In that undiscovered future of recurring springs,
If, growing old and plain, she no longer turned the faces
And saw the people stare?
Would she hear music and not yearn
To take her lover's arm for one more turn? . . .
The leaves hung breathless on the dripping maple tree,
The man across the street was going out.
It was the evening made her think such things, no doubt.
But would her lover grow old sooner than she? . . .
Only the evening made her think such things, no doubt. . . .

VI

And yet, and yet, —
Seeing the tired city, and the trees so still and wet,—
It seemed as if all evenings were the same;
As if all evenings came,
Despite her smile at thinking of a kiss,
With just such tragic peacefulness as this;
With just such hint of loneliness or pain;
The perfect quiet that comes after rain.

DISENCHANTMENT

A Tone Poem

Dedicated to Lucien Bainbridge Crist

I

Pneumatic hammers upon an iron frame
Resumed their harsh vibration now once more,
Through the hot air their terrible pulses came,
And upon his prostrate heart their clamor bore,
And paused and hammered again and beat and tore,
Until it seemed he must part his lips and scream;
He reeled in sickening clouds of oily steam.

There was no rest from sound, no silence ever,
No pause for the body, no peace for heart or mind;
Through the hot haze that hung upon the river
The glittering ferries paddled, and shrieked, and whined,
And he watched, incessant, the black crowds mass and wind
Stupidly through the narrow canyoned street,
With a smell of dust and asphalt in the heat.

He was a giant outstretched for torture now;
And all these things, transacted in his brain,

Beat him, and wore him down, and made him bow,
Filtered with agony through heart and vein,
To open, in a perfect flower of pain,
In his vast mind that now contained this all.
He felt a million men through one cell crawl.

Till the pneumatic hammers once more burst
Deep in his brain with frightful anguished fire;
Till all his life seemed hopelessly accursed;
Till sunlight, blazing on a copper wire,
Seemed the last step to madness, and desire
Dreamed passionately and singly of one thing,—
To leave this city and walk in country spring.

Yes, he would leave these walls, these hideous streets,
The parks, the steaming asphalt and hot stone;
In his blood it had all grown up, with a myriad beats,
He had made and loved it all, it was all his own;
The ugliness of every brick was known,
And he hated it now because he had loved it so,—
And because it was his past, he would leave it and would go.

He would cleanse his life of all its dying past,
Of all that massed corruption there within,
Yes, sweep it all away, be free at last,
Burn down and raze this growth of long dead sin,

And so be free once more to breathe, begin,—
Work with fresh hands and heart at something new,
And walk with naked feet through grass and dew. . . .

He tore the evening paper he had bought,
And crushed, and flung it down; and wondered then
If these were truths, or a mind much overwrought.
He mused. And just beyond his musings' ken
Lurked the great question: would he love again
This woman whom he had loved so long and well? . . .
And then the city vanished, and darkness fell.

And he ran his hand along an iron railing;
And thought that it was sad that life was so:
Life was always, where one least expected, failing.
But it was strange, yes, very strange,
That the lovely things, the things one loved, must go,
And that the things one wanted most must change.

He ran his hand along a twisted wire
In peaceful sad perplexity, and thought
That it was strange that one could so desire
To love a well-known city, or a well-known face,
Yet see it come to nought;
This city had once seemed such a lovely place!
This woman:—perhaps his mind was overwrought.

And then the pneumatic hammers once more burst
Deep in his brain with ceaseless anguished fire,
Till all his life seemed hopeless and accursed,
Till sunlight, blazing on this twisted wire,
Seemed the last step to madness, and desire
Thought passionately and singly of one thing,—
To leave this city and walk in country spring. . . .

The evening came;
And the sky was hot, and tearless, and aflame,
A brazen thing, a hideous thing;
And it seemed to him a shame
There were no clouds to shield this street,
No patter of large cool drops to break this heat,
Wet the limp leaves, and make the robins sing.
And it seemed to him a shame.

But the moon rose large and sleepy behind the housetops,
In the clear blue evening air.
And softly a sea-wind came among the housetops,
With a smell of kelp and sand and mermaids' hair,
And it seemed to him, it would be pleasant there. . . .
But then that question came back like a knell,—
Like a tolling in some cavern of his brain,—
Would he ever love again
This woman whom he had loved so long and well?

DISENCHANTMENT

II

THE little waves came ceaselessly in moonlight,
The small and personal waves; and by his hand
They chuckled and spread out whispering on the sand,
Leaving a rim of bubbles in the moonlight.
The ripples came one by one,
They chuckled, they whispered to him, as if in fun,
And, with a little hiss, melted in sand.

They had come up out of the darkness of the sea,
These small and personal waves:
They came up ceaselessly,
Myriads in the moonlight, hurrying, gleaming,
Following fast, yet always orderly seeming,
Each in its destined place;
And just such small and personal wave was he,
Lifting out of the night his little face. . . .

Here in the moonlight, on the seaweed,
The seaweed not yet dried
From the last rising of the tide,
It seemed he had lost that city of so much pain
And looking at the moon was free again.
The ripples lapped, the ripples fell. . . .
And this woman whom he had loved so long and well,

Was she not just such small and personal wave
Hastening out of the sea to the sand, its grave? . . .
Yes; maybe this was she, that broke in seaweed, —
Or maybe this was she, that by his hand,
With a slight whisper sank in sand;
Or maybe she had vanished months ago, —
He did not know.
And yet, somehow, he thought,
If of this beautiful sea she had been wrought,
Of foam and moonlight and blown spray,
It would have been a loveliness to stay, —
Not fading out so soon,
But beautiful still with each returning moon. . . .
Ah, it was strange, yes, very strange,
That the lovely things, the things one loved, must go,
And that the things one wanted most must change. . . .

The ripples came one by one.
They chuckled, they whispered to him, as if in fun,
And, with a little hiss, melted in sand.

. . . . . .

He swam in moonlight with slow stroke;
While round his shoulders and pale hands
A milky phosphorescence broke,
And a white line along the sands
Showed where the moonlit surf went in;

And phosphorescence went and came
In azure stars and moons of green,
And flowers of coldly bursting flame.
The moonlight poured, he shut his eyes,
Letting his body fall and rise.
And letting sea flow over him
A lustrous flood, assuaging dim,
He thought these waters made him whole,
And gave him back his virgin soul;
While, with his outstretched hands, he combed
Bubbles of green fire, milky foamed. . . .

He swam in moonlight, cleaving slow
The chuckling darkness of the sea,
He would no more forever know
That flaming city's agony,
But here he closed his cool eyes, feeling
The bubbles breaking past his throat,
And along his sides cold soft hands stealing;
And in the moonlight seemed to float.
No, he would never go back there
To that city of staleness and despair;
But here would break, in endless night,
Slow shattering stars of cold green light. . . .

. . . . . .

And now these ripples came once more
Lapping and lapping along the shore;
Like little tongues that tried to explain
Their vast and dark and hopeless pain;
Like little tongues that craved for speech
With a vague murmur along the beach.

And did he hear them? they seemed to say;
Not knowing, as he knew so well,
That he had sorrow the same as they,
But had no speech and could not tell.

For he had come up out of the sea
With seaweed clinging to his hands,
He had come up silently to the sands,
No wave was wretcheder than he. . . .

Yet, listening to the waves, he thought
That his mind was overwrought with grief,
Ah, yes, his mind was overwrought,
All this was only a sick belief. . . .

For the little waves came ceaselessly in moonlight,
The small and personal waves; and by his hand,
Coming up one by one,
They chuckled, they whispered to him, as if in fun,
And, with a little hiss, melted in sand.

III

She was beautiful, still, if seen in a certain light,
Yes, beautiful still if seen in a certain way,—
Sitting and sewing under a lamp at night,
She, who had once seemed beautiful all day.
For a moment he turned away,
Hoping to find, when he turned back once more,
All as it was before.

But it was not the same, no, not the same,
He realized it now, their love had faded,
It had lost its edge of flame,
It was saddened and degraded,
And there was no more lighting up of eyes.
Those were their morning, these their twilight skies.

And he watched the yellow lamplight on her hair,
In a perplexed and melancholy stare.
It was lovely, looked at so;
And the soft arm moving gently to and fro,
With the little thread,
And the graciously bending head,—
Yes, they were beautiful, still, if looked at so. . . .

But he seemed to look from an infinite distance now,—
He was alone, and she was alone;

And though he admired her hair, her throat, her brow,
With the yellow lamplight thus across them thrown,—
Showing the down on her cheek, —
Yet the love in him had shrunken and turned weak ;
And though she was lovelier than most women were,
He knew, and for days had known,
That though he might love again he could never again
love her.

For it was not the same, no, not the same,
It was a different thing ;
He was often, somehow, taken unaware,
And had no time in which he might prepare
An affectionate expression or a smile ;
And the words that used to sing,
The words that from his heart so easily came,
Now came with an effort, paled, in a little while
Died in a silence of profound and mute despair ;
For it was not the same, no, not the same.

And was it only time that had brought him this ?
And must time always come
Grayly betwixt the lovers and their kiss ?
Must the lips at last grow desolate and dumb,
All lips, no matter who the lovers be ?
And if it had been another, and not she,

Would love have come to just such certain end,
To leave them friend and friend?—
There was no knowing, no knowing. . . .
The clock ticked, she continued with her sewing.

Ah, there was the pity of it, there was the pity!
For she was the loveliest woman he had ever met,
And she was lovely still; and yet, and yet, —
Being known and loved too long, —yes, like this city, —
Love had at last grown tired,
Too much content where once it so desired,
And too much fed with touch and glance and kiss;
And now it had come to this.

Standing behind her chair,
With a sudden tender impulse he leaned and kissed her hair,
And smiling she looked upward for a space;
And in that second he saw once more the face
That had come upon him once like a lovely fire,
Like a torch of fire,
Blowing its flames through his soul like a blown desire;
Her eyes laughed up with a lovely challenge of light,
A challenge he did not dare deny,
And then he said "good-night" and she "good-night!"—
And felt, somehow, that good-night meant good-bye.

IV

All lovely things will have an ending,
All lovely things will fade and die,
And youth, that's now so bravely spending
Will beg a penny by and by. . . .

And then the pneumatic hammers once more burst
Deep in his brain with ceaseless anguished fire,
Till all his life seemed hopeless and accursed,
Till sunlight blazing on a copper wire
Seemed the last pain to madness, and desire
Dreamed passionately and singly of one thing, —
To leave this city and be renewed with spring.

He would take a day from work and go away
Into the woods, to walk in dew and grass;
If he could be a tree for just one day
He could drop these withered leaves, his grief would pass,
Keeping new leaves alone; and yet, alas!
Would he not be reminded of old times
When they had sought these woods for walks and climbs?

In this birch copse they had heard a wood-thrush singing,
On this deep moss they had rested for a space,
Over this stone wall seen a bluebird winging,

Or drunk from this cold brook with mirrored face. . . .
Too many memories whispered in this place. . . .
These pines, these roots, were flesh and blood with her,
She stood before him, trembling, in this fir. . . .

And suddenly terror took him, and it seemed
That she was dead, — yes, lived more truly here,
Where still she laughed with birds, in green leaves gleamed,
Than in the flesh; and creeping with strange fear,
He felt a ghostly wind, autumnal, drear,
And turned, made haste away, behind him heard
Low bubbling laughter from an unknown bird. . . .

And while the electric motors hummed with speed
And the reeling green world rushed and whistled by,
He thought it strange that he should have such need
And yet no help in nature. . . . Should he try,
Make one despairing effort, face this lie,
Deceive himself to think he loved again?
He had endured already too much pain. . .

And yet, if he could once but crush his past,
With all its tedious dullness, sliming so
Even the first love-days with threat of the last. . . .
What was he thinking? . . . He was tired. . . . He did
not know. . . .

Only, it seemed, if they could somehow go
Back to those first bright days, lose all between,
All these drab intimate things that crept to intervene, —

Yes, leave this city, this house, and all things in it,
All these dull people they had known so long,
This sky, these trees, these thoughts, and every minute
Of the intolerable months that worked this wrong, —
Could it not still be done? They were both still young. . . .
If they should repeat their honeymoon, repeat
Places and times so loved, — would life seem once more
sweet? . . .

No, it could not be done, it was now too late;
It would be piercingly sweet, but sweet with pain;
And after the disappointment, anger, and hate. . . .
He had reached the city, and sadly left the train,
Thinking he could not love this woman again,
This woman whom he had loved so long and well, —
It tolled and tolled in his dark heart like a knell.

And he ran his hand along a twisted wire
In tragic mute perplexity, and thought
That it was strange that one could so desire
To love a well-known city, or a well-known face,
Yet see it come to nought.

This city had once seemed such a lovely place!
This face had once seemed strange and holy as fire. . . .

He ran his hand along an iron railing
And thought that it was sad that life was so;
Life was always, where one least expected, failing;
But it was strange, yes, very strange,
That the lovely things, the things one loved, must go,
And that the things one wanted most must change.

V

The evening came, an evening hazy and red,
And quiet came.
And turning homeward with heavy and listless tread,
With a sense of pity, a sense of shame,
He cast a last long look at the paling sky,
At the houses, and trees, as if to say good-bye
To their happiness, which he was leaving there.
And then he faced their mutual long despair.

But as he smiled at her across the table
It solaced him to think,
If he could smile, and talk, and never shrink
At touch of her hand, or kiss,—
That he would, perhaps, if circumspect, be able
To make her think he loved, she would not miss

The fire he missed. . . . Or was she thinking now
These selfsame things behind that innocent brow? . . .
But, no, she murmured that autumn was coming at last,
And that, these frosty nights,
She feared the crickets would not chirp so fast. . . .
And as it was growing dark they would have the lights. . . .

He took his evening paper, she her sewing,
And with little speech, or none,
They sat in the lamplit parlor, and heard the seconds going;
And when the evening, at last, was done,
Lifting the curtain he was surprised to see
That stars and a moon were beautiful out there.
But were they as beautiful as they used to be?
And would they ever again be what they were?

VI

All lovely things will have an ending,
All lovely things will fade and die,
And youth, that 's now so bravely spending,
Will beg a penny by and by.

Fine ladies all are soon forgotten,
And goldenrod is dust when dead,
The sweetest flesh and flowers are rotten
And cobwebs tent the brightest head.

DISENCHANTMENT

Come back, true love! Sweet youth, return!—
But time goes on, and will, unheeding,
Though hands will reach, and eyes will yearn,
And the wild days set true hearts bleeding.

Come back, true love! Sweet youth, remain!—
But goldenrod and daisies wither,
And over them blows autumn rain,
They pass, they pass, and know not whither.

THIS DANCE OF LIFE

Earth Triumphant: Part Two

SEASON of death, October earth, —
Season when winds, with savage mirth,
Tear down the pale, the fevered leaves,
And cold rains drip along the eaves;
When wind and swift rain all night long
Sing Time's forlorn autumnal song;
Season when stars burn bitter clear
On naked boughs, on meadows drear,
While all earth smokes with sullen fires,
And leaves are heaped in flaming pyres! . . .
O earth, who, even in all this sadness,
Quietly work for future gladness,
Filling your heart with secret mirth
Against some coming time of birth, —
Filling with last warm suns your veins,
And drinking deep of these last rains,
So you may rise, so you may sing,
Laughing, in the great mirth of spring:
O earth! have pity on man your child,
Who, for as often as he has smiled,

Untoward fortune bids him weep,
Sowing in joy, in tears to reap!
Though he be yours, like grass or leaf,
And do your will, — you give him grief. . . .
O earth! man's mother! grant him then
His ancient simpleness again, —
So, though he yield and do thy will,
With primal fierceness love and kill,
Yet no remorse shall stay behind
For what was cruel, what was blind;
Unmoved by dreams of higher trust, —
Springing from dust and proud of dust!

. . . . . .

He did not know how this had come:
But suddenly, all his life seemed numb,
All out of harmony with this spring
Wherein the whole world seemed to sing.
Moodily through the copse he walked
And fiercely with his own heart talked,
And snapped a bough, and snapped again,
And with each breaking felt keen pain,
Seeing this young, this budding thing,
Cruelly broken thus in spring . . .
This broken youth, — was it not he?
Rage blinded him, he could not see,

But savagely through a thicket strode,
Cursed the torn hand whose fresh blood flowed,
And short of breath and flushed of face
Gained the hill's top, an open space.
Below, the valley lay outspread,
In checkered green, wherethrough a thread
Of shining blue went winding down
Through trees and meadow to the town.
Town! the word was a sullen bell,
The symbol of an abject hell. . . .
Ah, God! what folly to be thus flung
Into this graveyard,—he, so young!
Condemned to pass his whole life here,
Maundering round from year to year,
Spading his garden, pruning trees,
Stealing the honey from his bees! —
A petty life of petty frets,
Of baffled hopes and vain regrets,
And he, to this, forever chained! —
Then came a thought to him that pained
More than all these,—the thought of her
Who once had set his pulse astir, —
Who once in a magic spring like this
Had taken his whole soul with a kiss.
The same she was, yet not the same, —
For all her wildness now was tame.

He shuddered to think of years of days
Facing her brown and placid gaze,
Her gentle mouth, her gentle eyes,
Her brow so placid and so wise,—
To hear forever toning on
Her voice, whose song was long since gone,
Rising and falling, sweet and slow,
Saying no thing he did not know!
He saw the graceful small hand rise
To brush the soft hair from her eyes,—
All of her gestures, still the same,
Lanced through his soul like pitiless flame. . . .
Earth had deceived him! thrown fine dust
Into his eyes, and veiled her lust
Under the glamorous guise of love;
Captured him, bound him, lest he move!—

— All the repressed youth rose in him,
Redly the whirling world went dim,
Hot in his heart the youth-fires rose,
Those fires long smouldering under snows,
And like a flower his ripe heart burst
With thirst for life, its stifled thirst.
He saw it now! — By nature sent,
She served her end, and now 't was spent, —

She was the soft, the specious lure
To wake desires yet immature,
The savage lust of life that comes
Into the blood with horns and drums!—
Her end was served: 't was plain as day;
And now, by God, she was in the way!

The April twilight lingered long;
A robin tuned his sleepy song,
Balancing on a dogwood spray,
As if regretful of the day.
With deepening dusk a silence fell;
And soft, and clear, the steeple bell
Sang from the valley into heaven
With leisured peace the hour of seven.
Straight in the windless lucent air
The chimney smokes were rising there;
With absent eye he found his own,
Now by a puff obliquely blown. . . .
His own! It would not be for long.
He fought this mood of evensong,
For it brought tranquil apathy,
And in his heart, insidiously,
Spread a slow peace. . . . The sun was set,
There was a scant two hours yet,

And now the eastern sky was starred;
So with firm step, and lips pressed hard,
And all the youth in him turned steel
To meet and crush the heart's appeal,
He turned, and groped from tree to tree
The dark descent to set him free..

She was not strong: she did not fight:
Her eyelids fell, her mouth went white,
Nor did she reach a hand to him;
But dizzy, feeling her world grow dim,
She leaned to the door-jamb for a space
And watched his eyes with frightened face.
Chaos of pain! within her heart
She felt the green earth pulled apart,
Pulled apart and sinking down
With terrible winds about her blown,
Winds as heavy and cold as snow. . . .
. . . He might come back. . . . He did not know . . .
He must get out, and live, a time, —
Yes, live, — by God, it was a crime
For one as young, still, as himself,
To be forever put on shelf
Because, being fooled by love, he wed!
Heavens, he might as well be dead. . . .

During the pause he looked away;
He did not know what she might say,
What single tone, what single word,
What magic sentence long unheard,
Which might as swift as lightning-fire
Into his heart strike new desire,—
Love born of pity, love reborn
Out of an old love bruised and torn. . . .
But heavy seconds dropped away
And still she had no word to say;
The clock ticked loud, their two hearts beat;
And when they dared to let eyes meet,
At last, her hand groped at her throat,
And shrunk and frozen and remote
The hurt soul looked up through her eyes;
He felt warm tears, unwished for, rise,
His heart filled with them, and he yearned
To unsay all . . . yet coldly turned,
Seeing it all impossible,—
O so impossible to tell!—
And took his hat up, nearly blind,
Stepped out, and closed the door behind. . . .

He had but poorly acted wrath;
And as he firmly trod the path,

Thinking he did not give a damn,
Trying to laugh, yet through his sham
The memory of her face recurred
Terribly white to him, — he heard
Through his first blurtings her caught breath,
A sharp sound, broken, as of death,
And saw the anguished fingers tighten
About her other hand, and whiten. . . .
Pity! He would not have the thing.
The moon was up and this was spring,
The elm-tree leaves were silvered blue,
The moving moonlight checkered through,
And here the sleepy brook went down
Under the dark bridge to the town.
It all seemed hideous and bizarre, —
How paltry, beside yonder star! —
What mattered this when life was done,
When earth was frozen, spent the sun? — . . .
Well, it was over now, at last,
What he had pondered six months past!
And had it shocked her? He thought not . . .
She had foreseen . . . T' was soon forgot. . . .

Soft as snow the moonlight lay
Upon the roofs along the way,

Shaking upon these lilac-trees
Which trembled all day long with bees.
And through the hushed and moonlit street
Lonely he went, with echoing feet:
Past the houses gray in sleep
And past the steeple dreaming deep. . . .
Strange! but these familiar things
Put a troubling, as of wings,
Into his heart. . . . He laughed and scoffed
And scorned himself for being soft. . . .
He crossed the brook . . . this water came
Past their house, the very same . . .
What was she doing alone there now?
Thank God, she had not made a row!
Thank God, it all was done and past.
. . . Why did his damned heart beat so fast?
Had he done foolishly, or wrong?
Madness! Life was at best a song,—
Had you but hardihood to sing.
Pity! He would not have the thing!

—Yet all night long upon the train
Came stabs of ever-recurring pain,
Pealing of bells and roaring steam
Commingled in tumultuous dream,—

A dream in which a bough he broke
Suddenly with his wife's voice spoke, —
Rebuked him that he broke her twice;
Her hand in his was cold as ice.

. . . . . .

Lights everywhere! a flood of days
Roared past him in a tossing maze,
His youth broke bounds and lifted him
High into rapture, dizzy and dim,
And music with a cosmic beat
Swept him away on eager feet,—
He was untrammeled, once more free:
Where pour his whole soul's energy?
Ah, to this music he would dance—
And leave his destiny to chance!
And he would walk this Gay White Way,
To see these girls come, laughing, gay,
In summer muslins, calicoes,
With carmined mouth and powdered nose;
Swinging their silver chatelaines,
Their reticules with silver chains,
Strutting and giggling, humming airs,
Linked arm in arm in languid pairs,
With subtlest tremor and lift and glide
When ragtime music played, inside

Some gayly lighted music-store
Where some one tried a piano-score
While eyelids winked and fingers beckoned,
And smiles were met and dollars reckoned,
And fiddles quavered in cafés,
And niggers clogged in cabarets,
And in the alleys round stage-doors,
The rich Jews lounged and spat by scores,
Each waiting for his chosen queen,
His ballet-dancer, lithe chorine,
Who came with mad slang on her tongue,
And catches from her new show sung. . . .
High overhead the electric signs
Wreathed and unwreathed their fiery lines,
Shedding their hard and splendid glare
On towers, on buildings, everywhere,
And on pale faces upward turned,
Drawn white faces, passion-burned . . .
Ah, this was life, this hurrying flow,
This irresistible come-and-go!—
This world of passion, sounds and lights,
Of kisses, curses, drunken fights,—
Hall-bedrooms, over noisy streets
Where cops were loitering on their beats;
Dark stairways, thickly carpeted,
To muffle the nocturnal tread,—

Each with a gas-jet burning low
In pallid globe, or red, to throw
Fantastic shadows on the ceiling,
Grotesquely huddled, sprawling, reeling,
When man or woman climbed the stairs
Intent upon their own affairs.
Greedily now he drank of this,
Greedy of every curse and kiss,
Of sordid lives and ugly deaths,
Of love-songs sung by beery breaths,
Of flushed young men who went to dine
With tawdry harlots pale with wine,
The music and the restlessness,
The revelry, the weariness!
This was the thing! Ah, had he stayed,
This splendor would have been gainsaid:
He would be mouldering in that town,
Walking up and walking down . . .
God, what a life! — In thought he lay
And mused of that eventful day,
And of his standing on the hill
Seeing the green vale all so still,—
The trees, the meadows, and the stream
That flowed so softly, as in dream . . .
The chimney-smokes that rose so straight . . .
A watch-dog barking at a gate . . .

The bough he broke . . . the sun that set
Through twilight mist, all red and wet . . .
Whereafter night and silence came.
Did life go on, there, just the same? . . .
Curse these thoughts! they troubled him . . .
— For always in the background, dim,
The memory of her face recurred
Terribly white to him, he heard
The little catching of her breath,
A sharp sound, broken, as of death,
And saw her anguished fingers tighten
About the other hand and whiten . . .
Good God! would these things haunt him then
Here in this roaring sea of men? —
He must be active . . . work away
These phantoms in the light of day. . . .

Out of the East Side rose the sun,
And saw before him palely run
Through twilight streets, through canyons dim,
The stricken hosts who worshiped him.
Over the Hudson went he down,
And poured red wrath across the town,
And set the magic towers afire
And touched with music skeins of wire,

Lighting the ferries in the bay;
And so came night, and so went day.
And so the nights and days were spent,—
Like hurried clouds of steam they went.
Each whitely whirled, was lost in space,—
Another phantom took its place,—
Red in the waning sun they gleamed,
Like mountain waterfalls they seemed;
While to an ever-changing measure
He danced this dance of life called pleasure,
In whirling lights, with human faces,
In strange and meretricious places.
How would it end?—he did not care.
He listened, in a crowded square,
To one who by a torch-flare screamed
Of better worlds by wise men dreamed,
And how this rotten world of ours
Must be burned down and sown with flowers;
How all the hated great must bleed,
To fertilize the soil for seed,
For seed of newer, nobler things,
When all men would be equal kings,
When life would be a bright romance
And men would leave off work to dance!
Tear down, tear down! The old must die!
He waved his arms, his voice broke high,

There was a murmur of applause;
He stormed at governments, at laws,
And goaded them to rise, to take,
To seize things for themselves, and break, —
The mines must shut, the mills must burn,
The world was theirs to overturn,
If only with courageous hands
They fired this life with burning brands!
They were the workers of the world!
Let once their power be massed and hurled
Against the kings, and kings would fall:
This world was equally for all! . . .
Good stuff! by God, the man was right!
Let life, then, be a glorious fight!
Why live by law? Life comes but once,
He who refuses is but dunce.
Laughing at heart he turned away,
His life seemed newly rich and gay,
The music played, his feet beat time,
Why, there was no such thing as crime!
And so he went and seized Irene,
Who, for a week, had been his queen,
And kissed her mouth, and kissed again, —
Winced at a memory that gave pain, —
And waltzed her, laughing, off with him,
To reel in smoke, by lanterns dim:

To swirl arm's length, dip and rise,
With beating throat, with half-shut eyes,
Hearing the music wail afar,
Faintly as if from moon to star,
And seeing people past them whirled
Like vague dreams from another world.
Blow, you horns! Fiddles, play!
Let darkness be prolonged through day!
Let music rise and music fall,
And past the mirrors on the wall
All this pageant always sweep
Like dancers dreamed of in a sleep! —
Between the dances they slipped out,
Leaving the revelry and shout,
In a "family bar" to sip a drink,
With smutty joke and laugh and wink.
She told how a country parson came,
Suddenly caught with life's hot flame,
Leaving his virtuous past behind,
His wife, and church, to go it blind.
The hot blood in him long suppressed
Roared in his heart and would not rest,
And so he planned this secret fling, —
Just for a week! — but, poor old thing,
His wickedness met ending grim, —
The folding bed shut up on him

And broke his neck; the papers hinted —
(You could n't trust one half they printed!)
There was a woman who had fled
While they were seeing if he were dead. . . .
With wine-fumes burning in their noses
They bought a dozen draggled roses
And then to dance-hall flew once more,
To dizzy upon a dizzying floor, —
Feeling like swift waves on the sea
That whirled and crested giddily,
Shouting their laughter to the sun;
Mirrors and lamps were past them spun,
Pale faces glided through the smoke,
While breathless ragtimes caught and broke
And laughed again and hurried on
Through the mad darkness into dawn. . . .
A dream it was! and all that came
Therein was tinged and tipped with flame, —
The dingy hotel which they found,
The narrow stair that wound and wound
Up to a skylight, dimly gray,
Already paling now with day;
Then laughter, kisses, swift embraces,
And fresh cold water soused in faces,
And all the fine red web of passion, —
Thrown over them in subtlest fashion, —

Music that thrilled their finger-tips
And blossomed in their meeting lips,
White bodies beautiful with desire,
And young eyes beautiful with fire. —

Was it a dream? The noon sun came
Into the room like glaring shame,
And all that night, so brightly dreamed,
Squalid and base and drunken seemed.
Her eyes were red, her face was pale,
Her hair was matted, roses stale;
Clothes were tumbled upon the bed,
Strewed on the floor were matches dead,
And all seemed garish, all seemed grim,
Sordid and black it seemed to him . . .
The world transformed! his heart knocked slow.
Out in the fresh air he would go;
To see the sea-gulls gliding high
And shining golden in the sky. . . .
Strange, that such a puerile thing
Should make his dull heart leap and sing! . . .
— Down the winding stairs he went
And wondered what this sadness meant.

In Central Park the grass was green;
And through fresh trees the buildings seen,

Myriad-windowed, towering high,
Gleamed like castles in the sky.
O sweet green earth, O grass and leaf, —
Some secret balm you have for grief;
The waters plashing slów and cool
From fountains in a shadowed pool, —
What was it they reminded of?
Some half-forgotten childhood love . . .
When life was lovely all day long
And simplest speech was sweetest song.
No more than this? Why, no, no more, —
He plucked a maple-leaf and tore
Green vein from vein and let it fall.
No more? — Oh, yes! . . . He saw it all! . . .
This sweet green world, new washed in rain,
Sharply before him brought again
The drowsy vale, the sleepy stream
That flowed so softly, as in dream . . .
The clover-field so warm in sun
Wherethrough with bare feet he had run . . .
Why, it was there that he had met . . .
Good God! was that life with him yet?
Habit, no more! — He tried to smile,
Thought it would pass in little while . . .
But even as he smiled he fought
Fiercely against a creeping thought,

Which he knew well would bring him pain
Were it not rooted out and slain. . . .
He hurried forth. . . . He loathed this place.
Yet grief it was that marked his face.
For though he tried to shut his eyes,
And close his ears against these cries,
The memory of her face recurred,
Terribly white to him, — he heard
Through his first murder her caught breath,
A sharp sound, broken, as of death,
And saw the anguished fingers tighten
About her other hand and whiten. . . .

Laughter, rise! Music, come!
Into the blood bring horn and drum!
Sweet violins that edge with pain,
Insidiously, the softest strain, —
Pulse and sing and blow and beat
Faster for the dancing feet!
Clanging cymbals be not mute,
Lift your voices fife and flute,
Throb, you harps! cry, clarinets,
Mad music for life's marionettes! . . .
Like a whirling sea arise,
To suck the dead stars from the skies, —

Sweep those ancient sorrows down
In roaring turbulence to drown!—
Fill with sweetest sound the ear,
Let no sadness enter here,
Let this dance of life called pleasure
Move to an ever-changing measure!

Life was a strangely complex thing:
He willed to sing, yet could not sing.
Had he mistaken, chosen wrong,—
Was not this song the sweetest song?
And were not all things woven of flesh,
This unbelievably fine red mesh?
Folly! He only needed change;
Flesh loves the flesh that 's new and strange;
A cool mouth yet unkissed by him,
Fertile in unknown laugh and whim,
Warm eyes with new depths to explore,
Tones from a throat unheard before!
It could not be — the thought rose dim —
That fleshy things had wearied him?
Nor, sated, that he yearned instead
For weavings of a finer thread?
Spirit? — It was but earth's disguise!
Romantic dream of glamoured eyes!

What madness now to muse of this
When all he needed was a kiss! . . .
He took his hat up, smoothed his hair,
And walked Broadway to Herald Square.

Gracious and lovable and sweet
She made his jaded pulses beat;
And made the glare of streets grow dim
And life more soft and hushed for him . . .
Gentle she was, and subtly wise . . .
She brushed the dark hair from her eyes
And, from a depth of kindness, smiled
Trustfully to him, like a child;
Then, flushing faintly, bent her head
To loose a knot that twirled her thread,
And through the taut silk on its frame
Pricked her needle, still the same,
Her elbow lifting to draw through
The shortening gleam of softest blue. . . .
The fine rain lashed the window-pane;
Her clock chimed out the hour again;
And all his past life, growing dim,
Seemed infinitely small to him, —
A dewdrop that in sunshine gleamed,
A bright world for an instant dreamed,

Through which he saw his small self pass
Like ant along a blade of grass. . . .
The fine rain pricked the window-pane;
And on the soft wings of this rain
There came a loveliness once more
Which in some other world, before,
He knew not how, or whence, or where,
Had touched his heart and made life fair.
What was this thing? He did not know.
He heard the murmurous water flow
Outside the window, down the drain,
It seemed like inarticulate pain;
And through these many murmurs heard
Her soft voice in a gentle word,
Her laughter rising cool and sweet
Making his broken life complete,
And laying soft hands on his soul,
To make his sick heart once more whole.
Unreal his whole youth seemed; and now
Only her mouth, her eyes, her brow,
Seemed truth to him, — these hands that plied
So soft and swift, and at his side
This lovely dress, so silken fine,
Moulding in such lovely line
This slender body, and this breast
That rose and fell in slow unrest. . . .

The words came heavily to his tongue,
Heavy and cold and all unstrung;
And vaguely, to his whirling brain,
Confusion rose, in which this rain,
The murmurous flow, the clock's faint chime
That marked the ceaseless lapse of time,
And her soft words that rose and fell
Cool as water, sweet as bell,
Mingled in a rush of sound
That swept his giddy senses round,
Wet his palms and made his hands
Burn on his knees like firebrands,
And from his body sucked the breath
Leaving the bright room still as death.
Annihilation! . . . Yet he saw,
Secure as everlasting law,
Her arms in lamplight gleaming bare,
Her shadowed face, her burnished hair;
And all the heart in him grew weak
Seeing her lips unclose to speak,—
The sweet assurance, as she spoke,
With which her silken thread she broke,
Snipping with scissors, lest it fray,
Holding the work, arm's length, away . . .
Well, did he like it? He was dumb:
The wished-for music would not come.

She laughed and rose and shook her dress
In unimagined loveliness.
He hoped that he might see her soon:
Next week, he said, there 'd be a moon:
Pity to waste it, was it not?
She laughed assent. Her laugh was shot
With subtlest shimmer of trembling fire, —
Desire that trembles to meet desire.

Beauty was once more in his world.
This fine and delicate rain that whirled
Soft in the arc-lamp's lighted space
Eddying with such silver grace,
Was like her eyes, her mouth, her hair, —
Her loveliness was everywhere.
Earth was become once more concrete,
Subtle and exquisite and sweet.
The puddles pricked by endless rain
Were mingled loveliness and pain.
And up Fifth Avenue the row
Of lilac lights that glimmered so
Upon these huddled hurrying folk,
With her own lovely language spoke. . . .
Summer had come. The air puffed warm.
Lightning presaged the coming storm:

A tawny lightning, dim and soft,
That lit the brown clouds whirled aloft.
Out of a florist's window came
A tropic sweetness, thick as flame,
A man peered forth, the glass was steamed,
Intensely vivid the whole world seemed. . . .
Then, courting sleep, he lay astare,
And stretched his arms out on the air,
And yearned for something . . . yearned for her.
Some fever in him seemed astir . . .
The storm broke. Heavy rain roared down,
It seemed as if the world would drown,
The torrent rose, it lapped his sill,
It whelmed him down, he shrieked; yet still
Through all that chaos, like a moon,
Mellow and golden, as in June,
Above those hungry waters gleamed
Her face, in far-off calmness dreamed.

He pushed his blinds out: they were wet,
Jeweled with last night's raindrops yet,
Along the shutters he made them run,
They glistened in the misty sun,
Then, flashing, dropped. . . . He watched them fall
Dizzily veering down the wall. . . .

Pain could be dropped thus, could it not?
Shaken to earth and soon forgot. . . .
The wet roofs in the sunlight gleamed,
The park below him basked and steamed,
Some gutter-urchins came to play,
Ushering in the quiet day, —
Waking the hobo, who had spread
Last night's paper beneath his head. . . .
A sordid world! — Then suddenly came,
Like burst of blossom, rush of flame,
A hurdy-gurdy's golden tones.
The children frisked upon the stones,
The sparrows twittered up to trees. . . .
What lyric opulence, what ease!
And all this world that only now
Seemed dreary as a leafless bough,
Trembled a many-musicked thing,
Cried to the filling heart to sing,
Cried for song from a world of throats,
A song of love's impassioned notes! —
A sweet, an unexpected change,
Breath of romance. . . . Yet, it was strange, —
This joy now swelled his heart to pain,
Making him live past joy again;
This music's golden richness bore
Back to his first love's kiss once more

His tired heart, and it was spring,—
He saw the bluebird's flashing wing,
The orchards bloomed, the hills were green,
The world paid homage to his queen,
Blossom and scent were all for her,
Her music set the spring astir!—
What magic made that face so sweet?
Why had it made his pulses beat?
A mystery! it all had passed . . .
He mused. . . . The day was overcast
By vague reluctances, regret.
But had it passed? Or lived it yet?
Why in this instant's pang of bliss
Did he return to first love's kiss?
The music stopped. . . . And now the park
Seemed once more wet and drab and dark,
Drops pattered down from boughs of trees,
The hobo yawned and scratched for fleas,
The sparrows jargoned in the street,
A slattern woman scuffed her feet. . . .
And all was sordid as at first,
An ugly world, a world accursed.
What had so poisoned it, what blight?
It had been all so fair last night.
Before his glass with vacant eye
Pallid he stood and tied his tie,

Then dropped his hands and stood at gaze,
And wondered, dully, of past days,
And wondered where his life would turn. . . .
His heart was aching, seemed to yearn:
For what? He hardly dared to think:
It was a thought that made him shrink.
He looked out on the park instead:
The sun again! — Yet, in his head,
Turmoil of darkness took slow shape,
Merciless, there was no escape,
He fought it down and yet it rose,
His spellbound eyelids would not close,
It laid a black hand on his heart
And tore it pitilessly apart.
He loved her still! — he loved her still!
Out of his night the words came shrill,
Vibrant with fear. Yet, did he love?
His heart lay quiet, did not move,
While with a slow and anguished brain
He took his thoughts up, pain by pain,
And laid them open with cold hand
Better to know and understand.
Passion? There was no passion, no.
That had been over long ago.
But quieter love — affection? Yes.
Was it of flesh, this loveliness?

It was of flesh — but subtler flesh,
An infinitely subtler mesh,
Which fine as moonlight cast its spell
On body, and yet, on mind as well. . . .
He had been mad! His heart ran dry.
No woman would ever satisfy
His whole soul as this woman had.
What folly, my God! He had been mad.
Go back to her? His red brain whirled,
Chaos descended on the world,
A tumult beat upon his brain,
Each beat an everlasting pain,
A cosmic beat, a cosmic word, —
He could not, no. And yet he heard,
Despite the rising of this face
That only last night brought him grace,
Despite this newer voice that came
Into his heart like April flame,
He heard (and writhed with guilt of crime
It seemed as if for thousandth time),
Through his first murder her caught breath,
A sharp sound, broken, as of death;
And saw the anguished fingers tighten
About her other hand and whiten. . . .

Laughter, rise! Music, come!
Into the blood bring horn and drum!
Sweet violins that edge with pain,
Insidiously, the softest strain!
Pulse and sing and blow and beat
Faster for these dancing feet!
Clanging cymbals be not mute,
Lift your voices, fife and flute,
Throb, you harps, cry, clarinets,
Mad music for life's marionettes!
Like a raging sea arise
To sweep the dead stars from the skies,
Crash these ancient sorrows down
In roaring turbulence to drown,
Fill with sweetest sound the ear,
Let no sadness enter here,
Let this dance of life called pleasure
Move to an ever-changing measure!

The house fell dark; the chatter stopped;
The master's baton rose and dropped;
And from that darkness, sweet and slow,
From underworlds, began to flow
A threadlike music, shining thin,
Spun from a single violin.

Out of the pulsing dark it came,
The prelude of a little flame,
Divinely soft, divinely singing,
Sweetly persuasive, laughing, clinging,
Faintly dividing, shyly merging,
Complaining now, now warmly urging.
And now the baton wider beat,
The music opened broad and sweet,
And like a moonlit river flowed;
Now it darkened, now it glowed,
And now the small stars danced therein,
To voice of elfin violin;
And now beneath dark woods it passed
Where all was black and overcast,
Only a murmur in the night;
And now it sang in blinding light. . . .
The world dissolved as faint as dream,
His soul went downward with this stream,
Knowing laughter, knowing tears,
Through eternities of years,
Living bright lives in a breath,
Through death to love again and death,
Now a star and now a sun
Round whom the planets laugh and run,
Now a moon and now the earth
Changing always death and birth:

Wearing green and wearing gray
Through alternate night and day. . . .
Against the pit, as black as jet,
The master stood in silhouette,
He waved his arm, his baton beat,
The music followed upward sweet,
While in the luminous pit below,
With earnest faces all aglow,
All the musicians leaned intent
Upon their lamplit music bent,
And all the bows on all the strings
Moved like bright inspirèd things.
In sweetest concord, tone and time,
Struck triangles shivered chime;
Flutes and horns blew mellow sighs;
The symphony began to rise
Rapidly, on shining wing,
A living, pulsing, breathing thing;
It poured its heart, a flood of light,
Singing and crying in this night;
It cried to all things, near and far,
Impassioned love for moon and star,
And all the pain of all the world
Through this passion flamed and whirled! . . .
Triumphant love! his heart rose high
Exultant in a starlight sky!

New love was shining, old love dead,
And all his griefs at last were shed,
Fallen, like last year's leaves, to earth
Beneath this new and perfumed mirth!
Come night, come day! come sun, come rain!
Sweetly this blossom bloomed from pain.

Gracious and lovable and sweet,
She made his jaded pulses beat,
And made the glare of streets grow dim
And life more soft and hushed for him. . . .
Over her shoulder now she smiled
Trustfully to him, like a child,
The while her fingers gayly moved
Along these white keys dearly loved,
Making them laugh a jocund measure,
Making them show and sing her pleasure. . . .
A smile that dwelt upon his eyes,
To see what mood might therein rise, —
What point of soft light seen afar
Which might dilate to moon or star. . . .
A smile that for a second's space
Brooded wistfully on her face,
Opening soft her spirit's door,
Disclosing depths undreamed before:

Passionate depths of half-seen flame,
Young loveliness despising shame,
Desire that trembled to meet desire,
And fire that yearned to fuse with fire. . . .
And lightly then she turned away.
Ironic music rippled gay, —
Subtle sarcastic flippancies
Disguising speechless ecstacies . . .
"Play something else . . ." He rose to turn
The pages, while the deep nocturne
Struck slow rich chords of plangent pain,
Beautiful, into heart and brain;
A tortured, anguished, suffering thing
That seemed at once to cry and sing;
Despairing love that strove to find
The face beloved with fingers blind.
He saw her body's slender grace,
This drooping shoulder, shadowed face;
All of her body, hidden so
In saffron satin's flush and flow, —
Its white and simple loveliness, —
Came on his heart like giddiness,
Seductive as this music came;
Until her body seemed like flame, —
Intense white flame, so swiftly moving
That it gave scarcely time for loving;

But rapid as the sun she seemed,
A blinding light that flowed and streamed
And sang and shone through roaring space. . . .
The sun itself! for now her face,
Wherein this music's whole soul dwelt,
Drew him like helpless star, he felt
A fierce compulsion, reckless, mad,
A sweet compulsion, troubled, glad,
His trembling hands went out to her,
Her cool flesh made his senses blur;
While, head thrown backward, sinking dim,
She opened wide her soul to him. . . .

Past his life went whirls of lights,
Chaos of music, days and nights,
Her wild eyes yearned to lure him in
And close him up in dark of sin,
To lure him in and drink him down
And all his soul in love to drown. . . .
Her nakedness he seemed to see.
And breast to breast, and knee to knee,
Tremulous, breathless, swaying, burning,
Body to beautiful body yearning,
In joy and terror, flesh to flesh,
They flamed in passion's fine red mesh, —

Living in one short breath again
The cosmic tide's whole bliss and pain,
Darkness and ether, nebulous fire,
Vast suns whirled forth by vast desire,
Huge moons flung out with monstrous mirth
And stars in glorious hells of birth,
All jubilating, blazing, reeling,
In orgiastic splendor wheeling,
Moon torn from earth and star from sun
In screaming pain, titanic fun,
And stars whirled back to sun again
To be consumed in flaming pain! . . .
In them at last all life was met:
They were God's self! This earth had set.
Mad fires of life sang through their veins,
Ruinous blisses, joyous pains,
Life the destroyer, life the breaker,
And death, the everlasting maker. . . .

. . . . . .

Slow and sweet the silence falls
On moonlit walks and moonlit walls.
Sweet and slow, in fainting chime,
Far bells tell the death of time.
Who was this who lifted face,
Laughing, into time and space?

Who was this who sang awhile
Beholding his belovèd smile?

Vast and dark the river glides
Till it lose itself in tides;
Vast and dark as music going,
Answerless into silence flowing.
Now the violins are mute,
Faintlier wails the voice of flute,
Through the darkness only comes,
Remote and vague, the rush of drums.

Lights a moment on this stream
Trembled with a floating gleam.
Lamps a moment in this night
Opened little eyes of light.
Now the darkness drinks once more
Lapping ripples and silent shore,
Now the music and singing flame
Return to darkness whence they came.

. . . . . .

The world concrete again and cold.
The moon made lovely to behold
This softly sleeping, weary face,
Touching it with an elfin grace;

And infinitely sad she seemed
While in the moonlight here she dreamed.
The curtains lifted in the wind;
The stars accused him; he had sinned;
Yet calm the night was, calm and still,
A soulless, calm, unhurrying will. . . .
He lay and stared. His heart beat slow.
The sluggish blood seemed scarce to flow.
And then, with sadly curious hand,
As if he yearned to understand,
He touched this young and lovely cheek,
And all his youth began to speak
With painful and tumultuous tongue,
Making his gray heart sweet and young.
What had he come to? Then, like flame,
Remorse through all his senses came;
Over those housetops he saw far;
And underneath that distant star
Saw the green valley, and the stream
That flowed so softly, as in dream. . . .
And once again, in bitterness,
He saw that wounded loveliness,
A loveliness struck down by him
For dreamed-of lovelinesses dim;
And now that gentle face recurred
Terribly white to him, he heard

Through his first blurtings her caught breath,
A sharp sound, broken, as of death,
And saw the anguished fingers tighten
About her other hand and whiten. . . .
Ah, God, what shame! He had not meant
To give this pain: yet so life went.
And so and always life would go:
Always new loveliness to know,
Always the dead love cast behind
And greedy hands thrust outward, blind. . . .
Ah, God, what shame! A little while,
And this new face that made him smile,
So soft, so sweet, this gracious brow,
This dusky hair his hand touched now,—
Would like that other leave him cold;
The story would be all retold;
And all the troubled days thereafter
Even in midst of sudden laughter
When with full heart he leaned to woo,
This old love still would haunt the new,—
Shooting his ecstasies with pang,
Quietly crying while he sang;
And in the new love's eyes would be
This old love, brooding wistfully. . . .

A light wind blew; the curtains stirred;
The east grew pale; a sleepy bird
Sang a few notes, then life was still:
A calm, unhurrying, soulless will.

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THE END

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